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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000080

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION GROUPS JOSTLE FOR POSITION

REF: A. 08 HAVANA 969

[1](#)B. HAVANA 35

[1](#)C. HAVANA 77

Classified By: Charge James L. Williams for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Opposition leaders are beginning to stir after months of relative inactivity. As they attempt to organize their supporters, splits among them, and between the opposition on the island and the Cuban exile community are becoming more evident. The issue of the management of Radio Marti is a subtext that runs throughout discussions with the opposition. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Opponents of the Castro regime are beginning to become more active as questions about the leadership of Raul Castro grow (ref C). In the immediate aftermath of the GOC's campaign against USINT and dissident groups in May and June 2008, most of those groups cut back on their activity. Just when they were beginning to feel comfortable again, the devastating series of fall hurricanes hit. The GOC's post-hurricanes crackdown on "illegal" activities, which was aimed more broadly at all of Cuban society, caused the opposition to retreat once again. Moreover, some dissident leaders complained that their inability to assist rank and file opponents who suffered damage in the hurricanes cost them needed credibility, especially in rural areas.

[1](#)3. (C) The lack of a credible reform proposal from the GOC, epitomized by Raul Castro's year end (and 50th anniversary) speech in Santiago de Cuba (ref A) and the still-mysterious long absence of comments from Fidel Castro (ref B), seem to have given the opposition new life. The umbrella group Agenda para la Transicion and one of its major sub-components, the Unidad Liberal, have been meeting more frequently and producing declarations on the direction Cuba should take to reach full democracy. So far, these are short on detail and focus mostly on the need to obtain resources and build networks of supporters, and insisting that the democratizing movement must come from the island. In the midst of this, prominent dissident Oswaldo Paya launched a new initiative he is calling the National Dialogue. In doing so he sent letters to all other major dissident leaders, including those in the Agenda para la Transicion, inviting them to join with him. Paya's National Dialogue does not yet have an agenda but is rather a mechanism through which he hopes to bring the various opposition groups together to draft an agenda for change. In a February 4 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief, Paya said that the National Dialogue did not replace the Varela Project, but that the two could be complementary. Notably, Paya had formed a board of directors for the National Dialogue that

includes many of the most notable dissidents who are not part of the Agenda para la Transicion including Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva and Oscar Espinosa Chepe.

14. (S) The Agenda para la Transicion leadership initially seemed open to working with Paya even though, as they point out insistently, he refused to join the Agenda when it was formed. However, a meeting between Paya and Vladimiro Roca of the Agenda apparently went very badly. Agenda leader Martha Beatriz Roque (MBR) told us that the Agenda now had no interest in working with Paya on his terms only and she disparaged Paya's board as representing his entire following. Likewise, Paya, in the February 4 meeting said he saw nothing to gain from working with MBR and the Agenda, which he described as riddled with state security plants. (Note: Ironically, MBR frequently accuses other opposition groups as fronts for state security. End Note)

15. (C) A subtext of the discussion with all parties is the management of Radio Marti. In December, MBR and Vladimiro Roca launched a very public boycott of Radio Marti saying they will no longer do interviews with the station. Almost all other members of the opposition, including the other Agenda para la Transicion members who contributed to drafting the letter sent to the State Department regarding Radio Marti that was signed by MBR and Roca, say they oppose the boycott. Nevertheless, all also say they agree fully with the reasons for it. There seems to be a universal feeling that Radio Marti does not speak to Cubans on the island and is instead a mouthpiece for the exile community in Miami and elsewhere. But all members of the

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opposition we speak to say that Radio Marti performs a critical function and that it just needs to be reformed. MBR's boycott campaign, they believe, provides ammunition to those in the GOC and elsewhere who want to shut the station down.

16. (C) COMMENT: The renewed divisions among the opposition groups are not surprising. As opportunities arise for greater participation by civil society in Cuba, the divisions will likely become even more pronounced as the island returns to the more freewheeling politics of the first half of the 20th century. The issue of Radio Marti's content is emblematic of the fear among all of the opposition groups that the Cuban exile community will try to exert undue influence on the process of change on the island. That divide also has historical precedents in earlier Cuban history, but will have greater impact now given the size and power of the exile community. END COMMENT.
WILLIAMS